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ABSTRACT

Demographic, personality-attitudinal, and interpersonal measures were examined to determine which measures best predicted the couple's present family size and projected family size (present size plus additional children desired) for both the wife and the husband. Subjects were 35 Caucasian, middle class, Protestant couples in Knoxville, Tennessee. Results of the regression analyses predicted 70% of the variance in present family size, 83% of the variance in the husband's projected size, and 98% of the variance in the wife's projected size. Actual or present family size was best predicted by demographic measures such as the wife's age at marriage and number of years married. The husband's projected family size was best predicted by demographic measures such as the couple's success at birth planning and the wife's educational level, but the husband's possibly unfulfilled need to give and receive high amounts of affection also was important. The wife's projected family size was best predicted by personality-attitudinal and interpersonal variables such as her need to have children to confirm her identity, her high anxiety level relative to her husband, and her desire to give a lot of affection, which in many cases does not seem to satisfy her husband's high affectional need. (Author)

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Predictors of Couples' Actual and Projected Family Sizes

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Abstract

A group of 35 Caucasian, largely middle class couples, of Protestant religious preference and with the wife's age between 28 and 33, was drawn from voter records and surveyed in Knoxville, Tennessee. The couples completed a series of demographic, personality-attitudinal, and interpersonal measures in early 1977 to determine which measures best predicted the couple's present family size and projected family sizes (present size plus additional children desired) for both the wife and the husband.

Regression analyses predicted 70% of the variance in present family size, 83% of the variance in the husband's projected size, and 98% of the variance in the wife's projected size. Actual or present family size was best predicted by demographic measures such as the wife's age at marriage and number of years married. The husband's projected family size was best predicted by demographic measures such as the couple's success at birth planning and the wife's educational level, but the husband's possibly unfulfilled need to give and receive high amounts of affection also was important. The wife's projected family size was best predicted by personality-attitudinal and interpersonal variables such as her need to have children to confirm her identity, her high anxiety level relative to her husband, and her desire to give a lot of affection which does not seem to satisfy her husband's high affectional need.

Results confirm the continued strength of demographic variables in desired family size prediction, but suggest that interpersonal variables and personality variables studied in the context of the couple's interpersonal relationship are highly promising predictors.

Comparisons in regression analyses of desired family size predictors for women at average ages of 20 (single), 23 (recently married), and 30 were done utilizing two previous research efforts in the same geographical area by this author. Results suggest that the most potent fertility predictors move from (1) parental values to (2) the woman's own personality to (3) a mixture of relationship measures and personal values, as women move through early life stages.

Introduction

Fertility research preceding the late 1960's in the United States tended to focus on demographic variables such as social class, education, and occupation, and there was good reason for that. The most substantial effort at using social psychological variables, particularly personality variables, to predict fertility behavior (Kiser & Whelpton, 1958) had little success. Still, there seemed to be much room for improvement in a purely demographic approach to fertility prediction, as even the best demographic predictor studies explained no more than 40% of the variance, and some (Bumpass & Westoff, 1970) did this by including some non-demographic variables in their prediction equations.

By the late 1960's researchers had a reawakened interest in social and personality variables as fertility predictors, thanks largely to the impetus of psychologists beginning to enter the field. They were also more interested in the married couple and its relationship as areas to study.

Lee Rainwater (1965) began the focus of research on couples by studying sex roles within the couple, with his theorizing about sex-segregated roles as producing higher fertility. Cautley and Borgatta (Note 1) in 1973, John Scanzoni (1975), and Donn Byrne (1977) have since pointed to traditional sex role divisions and attitudes as contributing to higher fertility.

Personality variables in the couple relationship have also received more recent attention. Tiktinsky (Note 2) in 1974 found that, when modernity values were partialed out, clusters of personality variables from the California Psychological Inventory could explain very high percentages of a couple's fertility variance approaching 100%. Gough (1976) worked with individual California Personality Inventory scales and found women wanting more children to be low in perceived well-being, more conventional, less interested in making a good impression and less feminine, while such men were also low in perceived well-being, less conventional, less motivated to achieve through independence, more masculine, and more tolerant.

Other researchers have suggested that there are different causes for each number of children wanted by couples. Namboodiri (1974) found different demographic causative factors for each level of parenting. Townes, Campbell, Beach, and Martin (1976) found fathers wanted a first child to relate to and educate, and a second child to

be a companion to the first; mothers wanted their first child to fill affiliative needs with their relatives, their second to fulfill mothering needs and provide companionship to them.

Thus, studies of couples in recent years have focused on three aspects of couples' fertility: sex role relationships, individual and interpersonal personality variables, and on the differing reasons for wanting each child in a birth order. This study used 35 Caucasian, Protestant couples near the end of their childbearing years (wife age 28-33: Ryder & Westoff, 1973) to see what contributions demographic, personality, and interpersonal variables can make to the understanding of couples' present and projected fertility.

Method

Meeting the above requirements were 35 couples, which were chosen from 93 responses to a one-page questionnaire sent to 693 young married women in the 28-32 age group randomly chosen from the Knoxville-Knox County voter rolls (the remaining 58 respondents did not meet one or more of the qualifications for the study). Five dollars was offered as compensation to participants for participation in a study of "marriage, childrearing, and family planning attitudes and values."

Subjects were seen in their homes as a couple. They were usually seen for about an hour and a half of testing, with paper-and-pencil tests following a discussion of problems in child rearing. Subjects seemed to have attitudes ranging from tolerance to enjoyment of the tests, with most asking the experimenter to stay on after the testing for conversation on various personal concerns and most rejecting any monetary compensation for study participation.

Personality and interpersonal scales given to the husbands included the FIRO-B (Schutz, 1966), which has individual and compatability measures on inclusion, control, and affection; the IPAT overt anxiety scale (Cattell and Scheier, 1963); an alienation scale (Groat and Neal, 1967); a marital adjustment scale (Kimmel and Van Der Veen, 1974); male and female stereotyped trait adjective self-concept scales (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, and Vogel, 1970); a need achievement scale (Mehrabian, 1968); a dogmatism scale (Troldahl and Powell, 1965); a scale on whether a "woman's place is home" (Cautley and Borgatta, Note 1); and a social desirability scale (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960). The scales

were preceded by the couple engaging in a discussion of childrearing problems (Biller, 1969) which has been used as a measure of interpersonal dominance. Women were given a number of the same scales, including those measuring marital adjustment, the FIRO-B, overt anxiety, alienation, male and female stereotyped traits in one's self-concept, dogmatism, and social desirability. They also were given scales measuring sex role ideology values (Travis and Seipp, Note 3); impulse gratification (Westoff, Potter, Sagi, and Mishler, 1961); value of children to the woman's personal identity (Turner and Simmons, Note 4); and finally, her rated level of happiness as a child.

Demographic measures asked of both the husband and wife included their present ages, completed educational levels, occupations, childhood family sizes, ages at marriage, income levels, number of years married, education and occupation of both parents, number of children desired at marriage, number of years their mothers worked outside the home, their religious interest level, and their job satisfaction. Husbands were also asked their birth interval in years with any younger sibling, their number of sisters, feelings of economic security, evaluation of ther childhood economic situation, and whether they learned the value of saving as a child. Wives were also asked how many years they worked before marriage outside the home, and how many years since marriage; frequency of sexual intercourse, type of birth control method used; level of success in planning births; feelings of economic security; family sizes of her three best friends; degree of integration of sex roles in the couple (adapted from Rainwater, 1965); intention to work in the future; number of months engaged; and finally, how favorably she would react to her daughter wanting to work if she had a pre-school daughter (Turner and Simmons, Note 4).

Results

Table 1 shows that many of the sample couples came from lower-middle class families, but are now in a middle to upper-middle class category. They are averaging a little more than one child

Table 1 about here

per couple and project themselves as having an average of two children, somewhat less than what they wanted at marriage.

Tables 2 and 3 show correlates and a stepwise regression on the couples' actual family sizes to date.

Tables 2 and 3 about here

The most potent predictors of couples' actual family sizes, of which this study explained 70% of the variance were demographic variables, reflecting the wife's early marriage age which effectively confined her to the home and kept her from working due to greater possible exposure to pregnancy and lack of enough education to qualify for higher-status jobs.

In Tables 4 and 5 are seen the correlates and stepwise regression predictors of the husband's projected family size, which is his present size plus the additional number of children he wants. The study predicted 83% of this variance. The best predictors of

Tables 4 and 5 about here

the husband's projected family size are demographic variables. These include the couple's birth planning success, their degree of agreement on religious values, and the wife's educational level. But another strong factor is the husband's desire to give and receive a lot of affection, which other correlates suggest may be needs unfulfilled, at least by his wife.

In Tables 6 and 7 the correlates and regression predictors of the number of children the wife projects having are detailed.

Tables 6 and 7 about here

Personality and interpersonal variables stand out as predictors of the wife's projected family size, in contrast to the couple's present family size and the husband's projected size, which were best explained by demographic variables, The wife who wants a larger family sees having children as central to her identity, seems to express a lot of affection but apparently not enough to satisfy her husband, and she has a high anxiety level relative to her husband.

In Table 8 are regression equation results for this sample and two other samples of women surveyed by the author. The other samples are of 105 single undergraduate women surveyed in 1974 and of 160 women married to college students (Haskell,1977a; Haskell,1977b). The three samples of women came from the same geographical area and were similar in education and social class background, and thus it is possible to do a comparison among them as to what types of variables most influence their fertility desires. The youngest group seems to be still under the influence of

Table 8 about here

their parents and the values they drew from them; the college wives group, apparently too recently-married to be influenced by their husband's values, tend to be influenced most by their own personality attributes in fertility decisions; the oldest group, the present sample, seems influenced partly by their relationship to their husband, partly by their own personality, partly by their personal values, and finally by parental and childhood values.

Conclusion

Researchers in recent years have focused on personality variables along with social psychological and sex role variables as fertility predictors. But, except for recent research by Tiktinsky and Gough, personality variables have been disappointing as predictor variables.

The reasons Tiktinsky and Gough had some success using personality variables may be that both chose in part to focus not on individual personality variables alone, but on personality variables as related to spousal characteristics- i.e., to interpersonal, couple relationship areas. The present research also suggests that personality variables, unlike sex role variables and other social psychological variables, will probably not be highly successful fertility predictors unless they can be related interpersonally. Then they may begin to become important, as deomgraphic variables continue to be, in the understanding of desired and actual fertility variance.

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Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Variables	Men Median	Men No.	Men %	Women Median	Women No.	Women %
Age (years)	32.00			30.05		
Marriage length	9.20					
Marriage age	23.11			21.70		
Childhood family size	2.67			2.72		
Size wanted at marriage	2.18			2.40		
Actual family size	1.29					
Projected family size	2.04			1.95		
Father's education						
0-11 years		12	34		14	40
12 years		7	20		9	25
13-15 years		8	22		5	14
16 years		2	5		1	2
17+ years		5	14		6	17
Education						
0-11 years		0	0		1	3
12 years		3	9		9	24
13-15 years		8	21		7	21
16 years		8	24		8	24
17+ years		16	45		10	27
Income						
0-5,000		4	11		21	61
6,000-10,000		7	20		8	23
11,000-15,000		11	31		6	14
16,000-20,000		7	20			
21,000+		6	17			
Actual family size						
0		6	17			
1		14	41			
2		11	32			
3		4	8			
Projected family size						
0		3	8		2	5
1		6	17		6	17
2		14	41		15	44
2.5					2	5
3		9	25		8	22
4					2	5
5		2	5			

Table 2

Significant Correlates of Couples' Actual Family Sizes, With and Without Controls for Husbands' and Wives' Social Desirability

Variable	Correlation	Correlation controlling for husbands' and wives' social desirability
Wife's income percentage	-.59***	-.54***
% worked since marriage	-.57***	-.52***
Wife's job status	-.50***	-.53***
Husband's anxiety	-.48***	-.32*
Birth control effectiveness	.45***	.36**
Wife's income	-.44**	-.58***
Value of money learned	.44**	
Woman's place is home	.42**	.36**
Wife's age at marriage	-.41**	-.41**
Reciprocal compatibility—control	.41**	
No. years married	.41**	.34*
Wife's religious importance	.41**	.38**
Value of children to wife	.41**	.34*
Husband's social desirability	.40**	
Husband's income	.40**	
Wife's education	-.39**	
Husband's no. children wanted at marriage	.39**	.38**
Wife's sex-role ideology	-.38**	
Wife's no. of children—3 best friends	.37**	
Originator compatibility—control	.30**	
Wife's childhood happiness		.41**
Wife's affection expressed		.32*

***significant at the .01 level, two-tailed.

**significant at the .05 level, two-tailed.

*significant at the .10 level, two-tailed.

Table 3

Stepwise Regression for Couples' Actual Family Sizes

Variables	r	R	R^2
Wife's percent of time worked since marriage	-.57	.57	.32
Wife's age at marriage	-.41	.69	.48
Wife's value of children	.41	.76	.59
Female stereotyped self-concept difference score	-.27	.80	.64
Value of money learned	.44	.83	.70

Table 4

Significant Correlates of Husbands' Projected Family Sizes, With and Without Controls for Husbands' Social Desirability

Variable	Correlation	Correlation controlling husbands' social desirability
Birth planning success	.50***	.54***
Husband-wife religious differences	-.44**	
Wife's impulse gratification	-.42**	-.33*
Husband's affection wanted	.40**	.33*
Reciprocal compatibility—inclusion	-.38**	
Interchange compatibility—inclusion	-.38**	-.33*
Husband's affection expressed	.35**	.45**
Husband's religious importance	.35**	.32*
Wife's education	-.34*	-.32*
Wife's job status	-.33*	
Wife's marital adjustment	.32*	.31*
Percent worked since marriage	-.31*	-.38**
Wife's income		-.36**
Woman's place is home		.35**
Role integration		.34*
Wife's sex-role ideology		-.31*
Husband's mother—number of years worked		-.31*
Wife's religious interest		.31*
Wife's childhood happiness		.30*

***significant at the .01 level, two-tailed.

**significant at the .05 level, two-tailed.

*significant at the .10 level, two-tailed.

Table 5

Stepwise Regression for Husband's Projected Family Size

Variables	r	R	R^2
Birth planning success	.50	.50	.25
Husband's affection wanted	.40	.63	.40
Wife's education	-.34	.74	.55
Reciprocal compatibility--affection	-.37	.80	.64
Husband's childhood economic situation	-.30	.83	.69
Husband's affection expressed	.35	.85	.72
Intercourse frequency	-.30	.88	.77
Woman's place is home	.28	.88	.78
Percent worked since marriage	-.31	.90	.80
Wife's job status	-.33	.91	.83

Table 6

Significant Correlates of Wives' Projected Family Sizes, With and Without Controls for Wives' Social Desirability

Variable	Correlation	Correlation controlling wives' social desirability
Wife's value of children	.63***	.63***
Reciprocal compatibility—inclusion	-.51***	-.41***
Wife's number of children desired at marriage	.47***	.56***
Reciprocal compatibility—affection	-.43**	
Husband-wife religious differences	-.42**	
Interchange compatibility—inclusion	-.38**	-.44**
Husband's affection wanted	.37**	
Sex-role ideology	-.34**	-.46***
Wife's impulse gratification	-.32*	
Wife's job status	-.32*	-.31*
Woman's place is home	.32*	.51***
Wife's affection expressed	.31*	.48***
Husband-wife anxiety differences	.30*	.30*
Future work planning	-.40*	-.40*
Wife's childhood happiness		.39**
Birth planning success		.36*
Husband's anxiety level		-.35*

***significant at the .01 level, two-tailed.

**significant at the .05 level, two-tailed.

*significant at the .10 level, two-tailed.

Table 7

Stepwise Regression for Wife's Projected Family Size

Variables	r	R	R^2
Wife's value of children	.63	.63	.40
Birth planning success	.36	.72	.52
Wife's childhood happiness	.39	.77	.60
Husband-wife anxiety differences	.30	.83	.69
Wife's affection expressed	.46	.86	.74
Reciprocal compatibility—control	.14	.88	.78
Months engaged	-.07	.90	.81
Woman's place is home	.50	.91	.84
Wife's job status	-.30	.93	.87
Husband's affection wanted	.27	.94	.89
Husband's anxiety	-.34	.96	.92
Interchange compatibility—inclusion	-.44	.96	.94
Husband's need achievement	.26	.99	.98